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## THE NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT IN SWITZERLAND

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It is the fate of all small countries, especially in our time, that they are looked upon, more or less, as mere satellites of their big neighbors. Our age is accustomed to think in quantitative terms and to weigh the importance of a country largely according to the number of square miles it covers. If this is not quite in accordance with reality in the realm of politics, as fine-discerning statesmen certainly would admit, it is altogether wrong in the sphere of civilization and spiritual life. A witty mind might even venture to prove the paradox that original civilizing forces have always sprung from small nations—Athens, Judea, Florence, Geneva, Holland. But leaving aside such extravagances, we certainly are on the solid ground of historical facts in asserting that the smallness or largeness of a nation has little to do with the contribution it is able to make to the spiritual “wealth of nations.” This also is true for Switzerland; but although this is a commonplace it may not be altogether useless to restate it at the present moment.

There was a time when Europe looked to little Switzerland—to Zürich, Basel, and Geneva—for its spiritual guidance. This time has passed long ago. But never has this little country ceased to contribute its important share to the world’s treasury, and more than once it has been in the van of that great army marching toward the light. I need but mention the names of Lavater, Pestalozzi, Rousseau, to awaken vast historical associations with movements of which the world is still enjoying the benefits.

In the nineteenth century the main problem for Switzerland, as for most European nations, was the reconstruction of its political

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organization and the transformation of its economic life on the basis of modern industry. There also through its vigorous democratic endeavor it was leading in Europe and was not only the refuge of all sorts of political martyrs, but, through its very existence, an incessant but quiet revolutionary force. Hand in hand with this political radicalism it developed or made room for the development of a theological radicalism which was not at home in other countries. It is true, it had no geniuses of the rank of Kant or Hegel or Schleiermacher, whose ideas laid the foundations of a new theology or even a new religion, although men like Biedermann, Alexander Schweizer, Hagenbach, Vinet, and others rank among the best of their time. But Switzerland has enabled this liberalism to step down from its lofty academical height to the street where the ordinary man walks, and to exchange its aristocratic solitude for the breadth of popular influence. It has had not only liberal professors, but also radical pastors who dared speak out what they thought, and even official church leaders who did not fear that the church of Christ would break down if the Nicene Creed were not repeated every Sunday before a community which did not understand it. This freedom, it is true, did not come as a matter of course; it had to be conquered, as does every valuable thing. But the instinct of the Swiss race for liberty, strengthened by its history carried it through at a very early date, when in other countries men were still debating in the terms of the Middle Ages and condemned even mild expressions of the new spirit. So it came that for the last thirty or forty years theological liberalism has been in some sense or other a commonplace in Switzerland and the fight against orthodoxy has become a Don Quixote fight.

But fight men must, and time moves fast enough to provide us new *real* problems when the old ones have become imaginary. The social problem arose—nay it was here before anybody was aware of its coming. A problem big enough not simply for theologians and ethicists, but for the combined forces of human idealism—too big, in fact. It got the better of us, and enslaved us, and hit us hard. There we are and we do not yet know whether the latest blow from which the world is slowly recovering is the last one or whether the worst is still before us.

It is always in times of hardship and pressure that new truth is born, because those times destroy our shams and unmask our idols. They force upon us a new realism and teach us the lesson of sincerity. We call those men prophets who first awake from the dream and who are no longer deceived by the slogans of their time. They stand alone, misunderstood and hated. For their task is a most unpopular one: criticism, not against this or that detail, but the searching analysis of the whole falsehood and insincerity of present-day existence, especially where it is masked in idealistic garments, in morality and religion. Not against some outstanding formations of them, but against moralism itself, religionism itself, they stand. They do not want to reform; Josiah is not Jeremiah; they hate patchwork as an insincerity and futility. Revisionists never had the great vision or the penetrating glance which goes to the very bottom and lays bare the roots. What the prophets stand for with an overwhelming sense of responsibility and awful necessity is revolution.

This is what has happened in Switzerland. The last twenty years of religious development in this country stand under the influence of the prophetic man Hermann Kutter and his collaborator, Leonhard Ragaz. Although the movement springing from them has its very distinct and significant influence on theology, it is far from being a theological movement. It has its roots in the sphere where man is a totality, thought, feeling, and will being undivided as yet, and where he faces the problem of life in its integral totality beyond the artificial distinctions of "religious," "moral," "social," or "political" questions. It is this radicalism, this going to the roots, and this integral view, as against all technical departmentalization, which has characterized it from its beginning up to now and which makes it difficult to handle it under any definite head, be it "revival" or "religious socialism" or "new theology" or any other ready-made formula. It is not even necessary to know much about its history. It might have taken place under quite different outward appearances and personal connections. A few words of historical retrospect may suffice.

The origin of the movement or one of its main roots is to be found in a remote quiet place in Württemberg, Möttlingen, and

Bad Boll, where Johann Christoph Blumhardt and his son experienced that wonderful revival which takes us back to the Apostolic age and which, for a time, made the little village a European spiritual center.<sup>1</sup> The enormous spiritual forces which emanated from this place contrasted very strikingly not only with the "spirit of this world" but also with what the church of those days could give. In the light of this new life the surrounding world and its nature reappeared as in all prophetic times as essentially wrong and devoid of the regenerative divine forces. On the other hand the great experiences of these men led them to a new hope for the birth of a new world, not by human energies and not through the slow process of so-called evolution, but through the revolutionizing outburst of transcendental forces.<sup>2</sup> Although there was no propaganda in any form—in fact a very marked abhorrence of any kind of it—it is from this center that some of the greatest religious influences have gone out. I need only mention Johannes Müller, Heinrich Lhotzky, and Friedrich Naumann. But the most dynamic concentrated power was no doubt the Bernese country pastor, Hermann Kutter, licentiate of theology of Bern University, for the last twenty years pastor of Neumünster, Zürich. Already in his early scholarly writings on *Clemens Alexandrinus* and on *Wilhelm von St. Thierry* one feels that the sphere of mere academical science is too narrow for him. He has a message not only for students but for the world. This message first broke forth in his Zürich sermons, *Die Welt des Vaters* and in his great philosophical work, *Das Unmittelbare*, which for the first time shows us the "strange mixture" of the "Platonic philosopher," the "apocalyptic revivalist," the "other-worldly mystic," and the "radical socialist" which has puzzled all who did not try, or were not able, to understand it "from within"—from that point of organic unity

<sup>1</sup> Cf. F. Zündel, *Chr. Blumhardt*, quoted by W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> That Blumhardt the younger was in earnest with his religious realism became known to the world when, to the great astonishment of his pietist friends and relations, he entered, as the first minister in the world, the Social Democratic party and was enthusiastically elected by the laboring men as their representative in the *Landtag* in the early nineties. It seems, however, that he found the labor movement not yet ripe for his message and so he soon retired.

where all these different ideas are still melted together in the volcanic fire of religious originality. Nobody who knows Kutter will deny that his personality is of an exceptional unity and consistency in spite of its paradoxical traits. His next book is perhaps the strongest he has written, *Sie müssen*, an enthusiastic profession of socialism and an appeal of tremendous earnestness, which roused a storm of approval and criticism not only in Switzerland and Germany but also, being translated into different languages, in other countries. It was a creative appeal. It brought to life the religious socialist movement in Switzerland and changed distinctly the attitude of the church and of many intellectuals in regard to the social question.

It is not our concern here to follow the further development of the Swiss socialist movement. But we must mention at this point another leading personality, Leonhard Ragaz, minister at the Münster in Basel, now professor of systematic theology at Zürich University, a man with wide learning, exceptional vision, and the burning zeal of a radical. By his great political ability, as editor of the periodical *Neue Wege* and as professor at the university, he has become more and more the leading man of the movement.<sup>1</sup> Ragaz has had little time to publish. His works are a philosophical treaty, *Du sollst*, a volume of sermons, some booklets on ethical questions, such as antimilitarism, the new social order, etc., and a recent very influential book, *Die neue Schweiz* (1918). Those who want to know him would have to study the *Neue Wege* or, better, hear his lectures on Christian ethics and philosophy of religion. Kutter, who refrained from propaganda and political action, poured out the riches of the new-found truth in a series of books, *Gerechtigkeit*, *Wir Pfarrer*, *Die Revolution des Christentums*, *Reden an die deutsche Nation*, *Das Bilderbuch Cottes*, each of them covering another sector of that vast circle of life which he had sketched in his *Das Unmittelbare*. Some other books by other authors may be mentioned, viz.: Matthieu, *Die religiös-soziale Bewegung in der Schweiz*, Barth, *Der Römerbrief*, a volume of sermons by different authors,

<sup>1</sup> He and many others entered the Social Democratic party of Switzerland, believing in its religious background in spite of its atheistic profession. They were not afraid of proclaiming their great message from the ominous secular platforms of the "peoples' houses."

*Wir zeugen vom lebendigen Gott*, a small volume of sermons of highest quality by Barth and Thurneysen, *Suchet Gott so werdet ihr leben*, and the first social-religious catechism by Bader.<sup>1</sup>

But where is the theology in all this? Is it merely an ethical movement emphasizing the social point of view as against traditional individualism? Or is it merely a revival movement, having its originality simply in its emotional and voluntary force? Like all vital, revolutionary religion, if for convenience' sake we may use this very misleading word, it is conscious of the great danger which lies in the theological formulation of new truths. It prefers to leave them in the flexible, living condition of occasional unsystematic, prophetic utterance. Kutter especially uses with mastery the instrument of paradox, in order to keep the mind moving, which otherwise is but too easily satisfied with a fixed formula, confusing the formula with its infinitely richer content or meaning. On the other hand this anti-intellectual view of life is not to be put on the same level as current pragmatic anti-intellectualism, which despises the 'Iδέα as a simple by-product or even as a deterioration of the higher spiritual life. In fact it might be called a new idealism, if we understand the word 'Iδέα as Plato and Fichte did, as the ever-active, creative power behind the intellectual process, which by itself undoes and reshapes and reformulates its own intellectual formulas, never satisfied with its actual expressions. It is, after all *truth* which "maketh you free." It is a word, a message, a Logos, an insight, a vision, which produces the new revolutionary energies, the new valuations and the new attitude toward life. Religious socialism is therefore hardly the characteristic, certainly not the comprehensive, term for the movement, just as little as "revival" or "anti-ecclesiasticism" would be. They are all consequences, not the origin. The origin is, as always in great spiritual movements, revelation of new truth. I will try, as far as intellectual operation can do it, to analyze the meaning of this truth and to show how from this source all the different features of the movement have sprung as necessary expressions.

<sup>1</sup> Inaccuracies in the quotation of titles may occur, as they are cited from memory, most of them not being available in American libraries.

Our brief historical account has led us to a dualistic conception of the universe as the guiding intuition. This world is not God and God is not this world. Furthermore, this world in particular, this human society with its chaos and antagonism, with its injustices and sufferings, with its stupidities and sin, is not God's world. And life in God, true *godliness*, true humanity is something very different from what we see now. To see this tremendous dualism and to be terrified and shaken to the depths by this insight, that is the first sign of an awakening. The social chaos of our present society, which is based on the deadening destructive soulless principle of capitalism, which raises the Thing to the throne and enslaves man, which works itself out necessarily in competition and war, is the first and most significant appearance of the essential wrongness of this world. But the saddest aspect of it is that also the "ideal" forces of society, especially the church, have not been aware of this fact. The church has acquiesced in this order, it has identified itself with it and supported its maintenance. It has by this shown that it is a part of it and that its professed idealism is but a poor ideology, a self-deceit. It did not really mean what it said, and all its "spirituality" and "religious life," which went hand in hand with the world's injustice, are shams in spite of all their beautiful expression in words and cult. A Christianity which does not cry out for a new order, which at its best makes certain timid "suggestions," is dead, however active and "religious" it may apparently be. In the face of the present world-situation the only indubitable unambiguous expression of real idealism would be a passionate, whole-hearted, revolutionary protest. From the church it has not been heard. But from another quarter it came; from the labor movement, socialism, especially in its radical form, the Social Democracy. These cry out, they feel and see the essential wrong, they protest with all their energy, not against this and that, but against the whole system of life. They see the necessity, not of reform, but of a thorough reconstruction from the foundation up. They have some vision of that other existence which the word "human" in its fullest sense expresses. In them there is something of that original will to life and sense of truth which comes from God and not from the world. "They must," or as the French



title reads *Dieu les mène*. Blumhardt the younger, the Württemberg pietist, was some twenty years ago the first to see that and joined the Social Democratic party, to the great astonishment of his pietist friends. Ragaz and others followed his example.

How was it possible that the Christian church did not become aware of this truth? There are the two parties, conservative orthodoxy, or pietism, and the new liberalism. Those of the first have the essential truth, but do not understand it. They hand down their precious treasures from age to age without making use of them, without intrinsically believing in them. The liberals, however, are possessed by an idea, the idol of the time, which dilutes the truth and makes it powerless, the idol of evolution. Evolution is a naturalistic concept based on a monistic view of the universe, the conception that the past contains the future, that history and life are a continuum, in which always the precedent accounts for the consequent. For that reason each phase is, ethically, about as good as it could be, circumstances being what they are and a good cannot be realized in the future, save by closest adaptation to the present. The general tenor of an evolutionist mind is therefore optimism about the present and a modest hope for the future. Again, evolution, in a comprehensive sense, as a world-system, inevitably leads to relativism, to the assumption that nothing is final, that everything has its good and bad features, that everything is a certain necessary moment in the evolutionary process and therefore excusable. The evolutionist is extremely tolerant, approving the words of Goethe, *Alles verstehen heisst alles verzeihen*. Again, absolute ideas and ideals being impossible, he takes his criteria from that which *is*. He is very apt to identify the "normal" or normative with the "average." His criticism will be very lenient, he sees more the nuances than the great contrasts.

There is no doubt that this evolutionary thinking has not only penetrated but wholly permeated modern theology and also modern ethical and religious thinking on the whole. It is against this axiom that the Swiss movement strongly reacted, although it never denied that there is a wide sphere in which it is valid.<sup>1</sup> No man

<sup>1</sup> Evolutionism will therefore be used in the depreciative sense of a world-metaphysic which raises evolution to an all-comprehensive, all-explaining monistic principle.

is or has *the* absolute. But every man has something *of* it. He may not in everything be certain, but in some essentials he *is* certain. And it is this certainty which gives him both his awful humility and his joyful pride. He knows for certain that he ought not to lie, that he is wrong in deceiving his generous neighbor, and that there will be no possible evolution to upset this present certainty, just as little as his certainty that  $2+2=4$ . It is a conscience which reacts against that evolutionism which so optimistically views the past and the present and cuts down its demands for the future. Conscience never agrees with the causal explanation of human wrong. It challenges the whole existing society as Luther did, and is certain that it is right in saying that things ought not to be and must not be as they are. This absolutism is inherent in all deep God-experience. The man who rests upon God knows that he has something which has nothing to do with time and evolution, that he touches the absolute, and that this supreme experience is not ultimately dependent on what has been. It is no effect of a natural cause. In this he stands outside the world. In this act the Beyond becomes a Here. He knows from his own experience that this transcendental reality bursts into his life, not as an effect of what has been and not in simple continuation of it, but as a revolutionary force which reverses the natural course of life. Evolution is a reality, but not the *only* reality. It is this Other, the contact of the absolute, of God himself, with the soul, or with life, which makes life worth while, and which makes history something more than a passing show. From this point of view, life and history obtain quite another significance. The man who has experienced the absolute cannot acquiesce in the relativities of the present. The words "necessary" and "natural" lose their weight for him. The past and the present so far as they are wrong are no longer natural but unnatural, whatever their natural history may be. The possibilities of the future are not limited, whatever the present may be. A man's own "imperfections" become inexcusable guilt. He views his life and life on the whole no longer from the standpoint of the world but from the standpoint of God, of the perfect life and the unlimited possibilities. All imperfections are natural, so far as it is natural not to avail yourself of the di-

vine possibilities which are open to you. The slowness of evolution is, as you know from your own ethical experience, guilt. There is no other reason for it than unreason itself, there is no excuse save the very thing which cannot be excused.

This liberating view leads also to a new understanding of the Bible, just as far from the shallowness of modern liberalism as from the lifeless traditionalism and narrowness of orthodoxy. Liberalism has had its great task, to free us from an outward mechanical authority, such as the dogma of the verbal inspiration was. But liberalism has also had its day—nay, more, it has gone far beyond its own limits. It tried to substitute its evolutionary conceptions for the old dogma—the most disastrous *μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος*—and the result could not but be confusion. A natural history of mankind was construed under the category of cause and effect, leaving out just those facts which are beyond the causal nexus and which are the essence of human history. If everything is but the effect of what has been before, then, of course, nothing can be supernatural, original, and absolute. Then everything *has* to be relative. But wherefrom do you derive this first assumption? It is just the one by which the human element in humanity and the spiritual element in spirituality is eliminated. Just the one thing which boasts itself “scientific” is the *πρῶτον ψεῦδος*. If once you have seen through the falsehood of monism; if you recognize the dualistic structure of this universe; if you come to see that there are facts which have their roots, not in what has been before them, but in a transcendent, timeless reality, that under this world of tangible existence there is an unseen volcanic underground which vertically breaks through natural history in a thousand spots, small and great—if you are free to see that, you will be free and unbiased to acknowledge an absolute revelation, if you happen to meet it, of divine truth and life. And this is the experience of Christianity. Jesus Christ, a human existence, has been the *locus*, where the divine forces pushed through the surface of natural history and revealed the full meaning and the full reality of existence, of life, of goodness, and of beauty; Jesus Christ, the Logos, that which is the Meaning in all life, that toward which and through which all life moves, in which man recognizes both his Wherefrom and Whereto. It is

an axiomatic prejudice, not science, that declares that the discoveries of modern theology have shaken the essence of the old Christian creed: Jesus the Word in the flesh. The crucified is the supreme expression of that dualism. Both its sides are there: that this world which crucifies the son of God is not the world of God; and that God is pouring out his forces into this world to make it his, not by any evolution but by revolution. There is no more revolutionary event than Jesus' existence and no more revolutionizing factor than his memory. Not the teaching of Jesus, not his example, is the salvation of mankind, but the revelation of the final truth in his existence. He *is* the word of God and to hear and understand and believe this word is salvation. In him for the first time in the world's history full humanity and divinity are revealed, realized. In him "behold the Kingdom of God is among you."

Modern historical science has developed another way of looking at this historical fact. But it has not superseded the old one, just as little as physiology of the brain processes has superseded logic. Modern history gives, so to speak, the physiology, the outward causality of the history of revelation. Religious intuition, *πίστις*, gives its "logic," its meaning, its truth. It is an enormous confusion which the theory of evolution has brought into the whole of life, when it thinks to have superseded the old dogma. The old Christian dogma, in all its essentials, still stands untouched by modern thought. It is the great divine truth in a petrified form. There is infinitely more truth in Augustine or Eckehardt than in Herbert Spencer, although most of his statements, as far as facts are concerned, may be correct. Religion's concern is not with the empirical "physiological" aspect of the universe but with its transcendental meaning, not with the *de facto* but with the *de jure* question. The Darwinist theory of the origin of man may be correct; but the theory of the fall is also correct and much more essential. "Physiologically" men may descend from the ape. But essentially his origin, his paternal home, his birthplace, is not in this world. As soon as he awakens to conscious life, he also becomes aware of the fact, that he ought to be another than he is, and that he is, how he knows not, responsible for this sad change. The same parallelism or the same confusion is to be found in other

questions. Take the "theology of Paul." Modern science has made wonderful progress in disclosing the "physiology" of his ideas. But if you have discovered that the idea 4 after the ideas  $2+2$  is due to certain physiological processes, that does not exclude the fact that 4 is also in merely mental connection (logical necessity) with  $2+2$ . So with Paul's ideas. They may come partly from rabbinism partly from Hellenistic sources—no matter. They form, nevertheless, an inward, mental unity, and the epistle to the Romans is just as much a necessary organic unity as a sonata of Beethoven. We have attributed too much importance to these discoveries of modern science. They may be true, but they are of little weight. There is a level on which the differences between the "synoptic Jesus" and "Paulinism" and "Johannism" become trifles as compared with their essential unity. But this essential unity cannot be obtained by simple abstraction of what they have in common in their expression of truth, but only by penetration to the bottom of their common truth itself.

It is scarcely necessary to say that our movement is also strongly opposed to present-day psychology, which is based on the belief that the methods of natural science are applicable to the mind—the same unrealistic monism which is at the bottom of all modern thought. This relativist psychology has made the attempt to put on one level all religious experiences so far as their truth is concerned. Such a sophistic toleration is utterly repugnant to all vigorous, earnest religion. It is also scientifically wrong, as it is based on a false conception of experience. In religion as in other fields there are seers and non-seers, there is penetration which reaches the absolute, and superficiality which sees it only through the broken medium of relativities. The more superficial the insight, the more diversity. The deeper it is the more unity. The highest mountain tops all reach the same blue sky, always and everywhere. But this common experience or truth of the seers is something very different from that modern watery "religion" or "morality" or "religious morality" which it is sometimes hard to distinguish from a merely subjective play of imagination. It is saturated with the awful sense of the divine reality and presence. It is fully aware that God and World are *two* and to touch God or

be touched by him is something very different from all world-experience. Old supernaturalism, in spite of its crude and inadequate expression, is much more true than the modern conception of a closed universe. There is a world with its own half-chaotic causality of which man is a part. There is also a world-order, a natural flow of things with a certain evolution. But besides there is a living God with his own order specifically different from the world-order, contradictory to it in most points, although from another point of view it is a fulfilment of the natural order. And this living force works its way through the world, using its powers but reversing their direction, a revolutionary force; not a blind *élan vital*, but a purposive personality. His aim is to destroy the other world-order and to create in its place his own order, however we may explain the existence of this other order. Man has a secret access to this Beyond. He can approach it or be approached by it. That always means somehow reversal, revolution. This approach is both knowledge or seeing, and love or will, or, rather, these both are, in their deepest essence, one. To understand the lovable means to love it. But there is also a second-hand knowledge and love, traditional dogmatism and self-made sentimental religion. The difference can be measured by the measure of revolutionary energy. Where there is a harmless goody-goody optimism and an everlasting smile, trust in an evolution and superficial talk about progress, the attempt to build the Kingdom with the forces of this world, much activity and little concentration, words without "teeth," there, be sure, is not the Spirit of God. It is certain that a church which identifies itself with the kingdoms of this world and which only murmurs tame and half-smiling suggestions on behalf of the present world-order has little in common with the "Hosts of God" by which he builds his Kingdom. Again, a theology which scarcely dares to speak of God as a reality and which overlooks the essentials behind the details of the make-up is far from being a guiding force toward that new world. But there are signs of a new awakening; not those carefully prepared and organized self-made "revivals" and prayer-cannonades which we still take too seriously, but now and then some Centurion of Capernaum, a hunger and thirst for something better, a sincere

whole-hearted disgust with things as they are, a courageous unpromising protest and earnest break with that which belongs not to God.

I have tried to reproduce the main traits of our Swiss movement so that its significance for the whole life does not disappear under the details of an ethic or theology. It will not be difficult, I hope, to complete this sketch to a finished picture, to see how, e.g., the new conception of truth will lead to a transcendental philosophy as its intellectual expression, or how it necessitates a restatement of the relation between metaphysics and religion; that this criticism of evolution will lead to a new valuation of old truths as against the overrating of modernism, and the *Weltanschauung* of the nineteenth century will be seen as a comparatively unsubstantial contribution to the whole, as might be expected from its concentration on material problems; that there will be a critical attitude toward church activity or similar activities which are based on the conception of progress by evolution and toward display of activity in general, as being an easy way of dodging the main problems with the great danger of leading to mere pseudo-solutions which hide the problems more than they solve them; that there will be a great emphasis laid upon concentration more than expansion, upon developing personalities strong and clear and filled with the spirit of God before going to sell the little nothing we have. The Kingdom of God has never been advanced by organization and business-like enterprise and rush of activity, but by men who had the passion and the persistence to listen to the Word until they had understood it so fully that it *burst* out into life and fellowship. It is the men who have been in solitude with their God who have had much to give, not those who ran about with empty hands. It is not a mystic of the Middle Ages but the "synoptic" Jesus who said, "Mary has chosen the better part." It is this feeling: Give us, Lord, we are so poor, fill us, we are so empty, come to us with Thy forces, for we are weak—which we need most of all. The real great forward movement will come when we again understand the basic word of Christ: *Blessed are ye poor.*